

Vermont Project Profile in Truancy and Dropout Prevention

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Project Objective

Re-engage truant students in school; reduce dropouts

Age/Grade/Characteristics of Students Served

K-12 students who are truant, dropped out of school or have behavior problems.

School District/Schools Involved

Southwest Vermont Supervisory Union, including Mount Anthony Union High School, the middle school and the feeder elementary schools.

Funding Sources and Sustainability Plan

- Southwest Vermont Supervisory Union
- Best Institute Vermont Department of Education
- Vermont Agency of Human Services
- Henderson Foundation
- The Permanent Fund, The Vermont Community Foundation
- Bennington College
- Vellmans Foundation

Our sustainability plan is focused on systems change where the school implements the Quantum Leap approach with existing personnel. We are in that transition at Mount Anthony Union High School. We are hoping to eventually get local community support to sponsor our mentors, and offset administrative costs with consulting and training.

What services are provided to students? Families? Others?

- The Plan process (individualized educational plan), conflict resolution, mentoring, student intervention and support, tutoring, community task force development, integration into the K-12 school system, national and international cultural exchanges, building foundations of peace, learning expeditions (field trips), training workshops.
- Functions/activities are integrated with the Quantum Leap process/approach (i.e., building from student strengths and interests, mediation as a non-judgmental approach, integration with Bennington College coursework and students, active learning).

What are the results to date?

Twenty-three out of 25 second year students referred to Quantum Leap are in an accredited educational program. Twenty-three out of 25 second year students had an attendance of more than 20 percent. Compared to students being out of school. 25 out of 25 second year students have articulated their career goals. Students have a decrease in violent or self-destructive behavior. This is indicated by a conversation with the Dean of Students and interviews with the students that 24 out of 25 students have gotten into fewer physical fights. Three of our students

(two of whom had previously dropped out) have completed high school. Two more are graduating this June. The rest are still in school.

What challenges is the program facing?

Quantum Leap has gone from a volunteer pilot program to a funded program of Southwest Vermont Supervisory Union to having a classroom at Mount Anthony Union High School to full scale systems change next year. We continue to face the challenge of funding for our mentoring outreach program, where our staff goes to student's homes and mediates between families, students and schools. We also face the challenge of funding our program administration. We are beginning to focus more substantially on the middle school and the elementary schools in Bennington County.

What partnerships has the project developed?

We have many partnerships in Bennington and elsewhere. We are in partnership with the following schools and organizations:

- Mount Anthony Union High School
- Mount Anthony Union Middle School
- Catamount Elementary School
- Pownal Elementary School
- Bennington Elementary School
- Family Court and Bennington Social and Rehabilitative Services
- Sunrise Family Services and United Counseling Service;
- Catamount Regional Partnership and Southwest Vermont Health Care;
- Center for Restorative Justice
- Bennington College
- Southwest Supervisory Union
- Bushwick High School in Brooklyn, New York
- High Schools in Karachi, Pakistan and Lagos, Nigeria

What can you offer to other communities and schools that are interested in truancy and dropout prevention and intervention?

Quantum Leap is very interested in sharing its approach with other schools and communities. We offer training and consultation. We have offered a training for mediators and educators in Brattleboro, Vermont, and consulted with the Whitingham School. Our approach is based on three concepts:

- The Personal Learning Plan (inspired by John Dewey and the Bennington College Plan Process)
- Conflict Resolution Skills (Mediation and Negotiation)
- Systems Change (the ability of schools and communities to meet the needs of At-Risk students).

Please briefly share a “case example” that would illustrate how your project addresses truancy and dropout issues.

Susan and Danny arrived at the trailer in Pownal, Vermont. There was hardly any plumbing; the windows were cracked, and there was trash everywhere. There was a sofa sitting outside along with a table. The three boys came outside to be interviewed by Susan and Danny. The middle boy hid under the table, and would only talk from under the table. The younger boy just stood and hung out. The older one was the only one really speaking. After several meetings, the younger boy was still not able to speak very much, and seemed very depressed. He was in fifth

grade and hadn't been in school for a year and a half. Finally, Susan and Danny asked the older brother if there was any subject that the younger brother was excited about, and after reflecting, the boy said yes, "cheese." "Cheese?" asked Danny and Susan somewhat incredulously. "Yes", said the boy. So they immediately called on the younger brother and asked if it was true that he liked cheese. A big smile crossed his face for the first time. "All kinds of cheese?" asked Susan, "like Swiss, Roquefort, and Camembert?" Yes, he replied, seeming very knowledgeable about exotic cheeses. The next week, Danny contacted The Grafton Cheese Factory, and Susan, Danny and this young boy went on an amazing tour to see how cheese was made. This was the beginning of the transformation of this young man. He is back in school, very successful, and wanting to own his own cheese factory some day.